std::monostate_function<>

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Abstract

This paper presents a template named std::monostate_function that may be instantiated with a function pointer or member function pointer, producing the type of a function object that invokes the corresponding Callable. The primary use-cases of this facility are as the Comparator for an associative container, and as the deleter of a std::unique_ptr.

Motivation

The standard library has a number of type templates that take a function object as a template parameter. The instantiated type of such a template often has one or more constructors that allow for initialization of an instance of that Callable. Examples of this pattern include but are not limited to std::set, std::map, std::priority_queue, and std::unique_ptr.

In the case where a user wishes to specify a function pointer as the Callable with such a template, that user must provide the function pointer type and also pass in the function pointer itself through the constructor of the instantiation. For example:

```cpp
bool custom_compare(int, int) { /*...*/ } // Pre-existing function
std::set<int, decltype(&custom_compare)> ints(&custom_compare);
```

There are numerous drawbacks to this approach:

1. The user must properly specify a function pointer type when instantiating the template.
2. The user must explicitly pass in the desired function pointer value during construction of the encapsulating type.
3. Forgetting to pass the value during construction would result in undefined behavior if the Callable were to be invoked.
4. The instantiation may be suboptimal since an implementation is less-likely to inline calls to that function.
5. There will be an increase in size of the type due to the need to contain a function pointer.
6. Specification of a member function pointer is not directly possible.

An alternative to the above approach is to create a new, empty function object type that forwards along its parameters to the existing function. This type is then used instead of the function pointer directly. For example:

```cpp
struct custom_compare_t
{
    bool operator()(int lhs, int rhs) const { return custom_compare(lhs, rhs); }
};

std::set<int, custom_compare_t> ints;
```

The creation of a type such as custom_compare_t is mechanical. An equivalent type can instead be concisely generated by a template, thanks in part to a new C++ language facility: declaring non-type template arguments with auto [1]. With the template std::monostate_function that is proposed in this paper, the above user-created custom_compare_t type may be replaced by the template instantiation std::monostate_function<&custom_compare>. 


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Additional Considerations

This proposal does not require the operator() of std::monostate_function instantiations to be conditionally noexcept. This is only because it is based on existing practice with respect to the application of noexcept to standard library facilities. The author believes that this function should be required to be conditionally noexcept and so should std::invoke, though that recommended divergence regarding specification of noexcept is beyond the scope of this paper.

For completeness, in addition to the operations described above, instantiations of std::monostate_function could be fully comparable and hashable, as well. Relational operations, specifically, are left out of this paper only due to anticipation of recommendations from LEWG and LWG regarding how precisely such operations should be specified in the next C++ standard. It is unclear at this time whether recommended practice for new facilities such as this will be to define overloaded relational operators or to define a specialization of std::default_order. The choice may be further influenced by a possible acceptance of a default comparisons proposal, such as a revision of "Default comparisons"[2], and so this proposal only focuses on the essential functionality for the time being.

Acknowledgments

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References
